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SUBJECT: GEORGIANS SEIZE PEACEKEEPERS' AMMO TRUCK IN ZUGDIDI

REF: TBILISI 819

¶1. Summary and Comment: On the evening of June 17, Georgian police seized an CIS peacekeeping truck carrying ammunition and anti-tank missiles traveling from Abkhazia to a peacekeeping checkpoint near the Georgian village of Urta, on the Zugdidi side of the conflict zone. Four peacekeepers were detained following a scuffle with local police and released two hours later. Shota Utiashvili, Deputy Minister of Interior, said that the peacekeepers were detained for not notifying the Georgian side in advance of the weapons transfer and for not having the anti-tank missiles on the weapons manifest. Because the anti-tank missiles are considered standard, battalion-issued weaponry, their presence is not considered a violation of the 1994 Moscow Cease-Fire Agreement. The ammo truck seizure is the second incident in a month to arise from a failure of the Russian peacekeepers to give advance notice of their movements to the Georgian side. The first was a May 18 incident (reftel) resulting in a collision between a CIS PKF truck and a private vehicle. These incidents have turned routine troop transfers into tense standoffs with local citizens and police, reinforcing the already high negative public opinion of the CIS peacekeepers and bolstering calls for their removal. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. On June 17, Georgian media reported that Georgian police had seized a CIS peacekeeping truck carrying ammunition and anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles being transferred from Abkhazia to a peacekeeping checkpoint near the Georgian village of Urta, on the Zugdidi side of the conflict zone. Georgian officials later confirmed that there were no anti-aircraft missiles in the truck. Four peacekeepers were arrested following a brief scuffle with police and released two hours later, while the truck remains in Georgian custody. Mamuka Kurashvili, Commander of Georgian peacekeeping operations, said in a television interview that the Russian weapons transfer was a violation of "all agreements" because the Russian side failed to notify the Georgians in advance. He said he suspected the Russians of trying to establish a military base in the village of Urta.

¶3. Deputy Minister of Interior Shota Utiashvili confirmed that Georgian police had seized the truck and briefly detained four peacekeepers. The peacekeepers were held for two hours and then released without further incident. He said that the Russians had failed to notify the Georgians in advance of the weapons transfer, and the anti-tank missiles were not listed on the weapons manifest, both violations of established practice between the Georgian and Russian sides. The presence of the anti-tank missiles themselves does not constitute a violation of the 1994 Moscow Agreement, he said, because they are considered to be standard, battalion-issued weaponry. He noted that the truck would likely be released later today, June 18, following the completion of an MoIA investigation into the matter.

TEFFT